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Luke 23



Gospel of Luke - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into Luke 23, discussing the discrepancies between the reports of Luke, Matthew, and Mark. He offers possible explanations for the differences, including the likelihood that each writer may not have had access to the full scenario. Gregg also examines the political and religious climate of the time and the roles of key figures such as Pilate and Herod in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Finally, he explores the significance of Jesus' final words from the cross and the implications for believers today.

Transcript

Okay, before we go into Luke 23, I might want to just say that a solution to the difficulty we observed in the last session may have been discovered. The problem of the second person who confronted Peter when he denied the Lord the second time. Remember I said that this person is said to be another person, that is other than the first girl who spoke to him.

And they said you're also of them. This is Luke 22.58 And Peter said, man I am not. Indicating this other person was a man, not a woman.

Now in Mark's Gospel, when he talks about Peter's denials, when he talks about the second one which is the same one we were just talking about, it says in verse 69 of Mark 14 Mark 14, 69 and 70 says, and the servant girl, it says the servant girl, which suggests it's the same servant girl he mentioned previously, the servant girl saw him again. This also suggests it's the same girl. She saw him before and said this and now the girl saw him again and was still convinced.

So she began to say to those who stood by, this is one of them. Now this is important, she began to say this but he denied it again. Now if she began to say this, there may have been some ongoing communication.

She may have been saying it to a crowd and it may have been a guy in the crowd then confronted Peter and said, you're the one. It may be that several people through this girl's beginning to say this about him, got on the bandwagon and said, you know, I think

he is the one and so forth. And there may have been in particular a guy who was in his face about it to whom Peter said, man, get out of my face.

I don't know the man. That is to say, just because the girl, the same girl in fact may well have been the one who started up the second confrontation she may not have at all been alone in it. She may have stirred up others including a man who may have taken the lead in accusing him and therefore his response may have in fact been to that man.

This perhaps requires a bit of ingenuity but it's not at all impossible. And I had said in the previous lecture, I couldn't think of any solution but that just shows the shortage of my imagination. There are ways that these things can be sometimes explained so as to actually remove the difficulty.

You see in Matthew's Gospel, in Matthew 27 the second occasion is verse 71 and when he had gone out to the gateway another girl saw him and said to those who were there. Now Mark said it was the same girl, saw him again but you see if there were a crowd of people there may have been the same girl said this and another girl confirmed it and another guy got on the bandwagon and Peter had to you know, finally when he spoke up addressed the guy who was the loudest and most vociferous accuser. These are possibilities.

To my mind, it's not an unlikely scenario at all and it would make all the passages work okay. Still, even if that is true one has to wonder if Luke and Matthew and Mark knew this whole scenario, why do they report it in such different terms from each other? Well, it's possible that they didn't know the scenario but if they did then we needn't find an actual discrepancy as I was suggesting earlier. Now chapter 23, we remember at the end of chapter 22 Jesus has had three trials, only one of them is mentioned in Luke but the other Gospels when you combine them we find that he has three times stood before the high priest, once Annas and twice Caiaphas and Caiaphas was not alone he was with the Sanhedrin and finally by as it was day they managed to find some way to justify accusing him of blasphemy which to their mind was sufficient to put him to death but they didn't have the authority to put him to death under the Roman governance.

Judea was a province of Rome, they had been conquered by Rome a hundred years earlier and they were living under Roman law and the Romans did not allow the Jews to put people to death so in order to carry out their scheme they had to get Rome to approve. Rome in this case means Pilate, the Roman appointee who is governing the province of Judea. So chapter 23 verse 1 says, then the whole multitude of them arose and led Jesus to Pilate and they began to accuse him saying we found this fellow perverting the nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar saying that he himself is Christ a king.

Now everything here is a lie, Jesus was doing nothing to pervert the nation, he was telling people to turn the other cheek, he was telling people to love their neighbor, he

was telling people to forgive, he was telling people to not be hypocrites but to be just and merciful if this is perverting the nation then I don't know I don't know what good teaching would be for the nation, I don't know how you would seek to improve the nation. Jesus was doing nothing that anyone reasonably could say was perverting anybody. Now they say specifically he was teaching that they shouldn't pay taxes to Caesar, this was an outright lie they had asked him that very question, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not tribute to Caesar or not and he said ultimately he said render to Caesar what is his and to God what is his Jesus apparently was saying yeah if the money is Caesar's give it to him.

That's just the opposite of forbidding it so they just they didn't care what he said they just wanted to report what they wanted to report and they paid no attention to the truth and saying that he himself is Christ a king. Well in private Jesus had a couple of times mentioned that he was Christ to the woman at the well and to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi but these accusers were not there to hear it. We have no record of Jesus ever saying such things publicly.

It certainly was not his manner to go around publicly saying I'm the Christ I'm the king. He wanted people to figure that out for themselves or more properly to have the father reveal it to them. Even after Peter said you are the Christ the son of the living God he said the father revealed that to you now don't tell anyone.

So I mean Jesus was the Christ he did not deny it but he certainly wasn't going about stirring up the crowds like some of the false messiahs did trying to make themselves out to be the Christ so that people would follow them in a revolution against Rome and yet that's exactly the impression these Jews are trying to give to Pilate. We find though that it didn't really stick with Pilate and I said earlier in an earlier lecture when we were talking about the triumphal entry the people proclaiming Jesus to be the king that's just the kind of thing that the Romans normally would want to put down quickly. These uprisings these popular messiah uprisings against Rome and it can hardly be that Pilate was unaware of it.

He knew that he was ruling a volatile province everyone knew Judea was an ungovernable people and he had soldiers everywhere keeping their ears open looking for evidences of any kind of budding plot against Rome. Certainly a public display like that of the triumphal entry would not have been unnoticed. In fact I dare say that there had to be soldiers of the Romans or spies of the Romans at least observing it and reporting on it.

But what looked like it could become suddenly a public uprising Jesus didn't let it happen. As soon as he came in Jerusalem the crowds dispersed he looked around the temple and went home. I mean he could have seized the moment but he wasn't interested in that.

I think that Pilate had his intelligence around. I think people were on Rome's side looking for troublemakers. I'm sure that Pilate had done some research on Jesus.

He was not an invisible character he was a highly visible character and highly controversial. So it seems to me that when they came and made these accusations about Christ to Pilate he just didn't believe them because his accusation was I find no legitimacy in your charges. And there were no witnesses that came in Jesus' favor.

It's not like Pilate said well you guys say this but these other witnesses say he's innocent. There were no witnesses saying he was innocent. There were only people accusing him and he was doing very little to defend himself and yet with that kind of evidence in front of him Pilate said I don't think he's guilty of anything.

I think he's not guilty. Well how could he make that decision when the only thing he'd heard about Jesus was that he was telling people not to pay taxes to Caesar and corrupting the people. He must have known these charges are nothing.

By the way if Jesus had been doing so the Jews would have been happy with him and Pilate knew that too. Why would these Jews care about a guy doing those things? That would not bother them. It was clear they were lying and he might have had enough information.

You know even when he was asked is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not and he gave his answer this was not in a private setting. It's very possible that there were Roman sympathizers or even soldiers not far away overhearing his answer. Reporting back to Pilate this guy's not a threat.

He's telling people they should pay tribute to you or to Caesar. I don't want to read too much between the lines but I don't want to read too little between the lines. It seems somewhat inexplicable that Pilate would have delivered him a Jewish rabble rouser as he's been reported to be who's telling people not to pay tribute to Caesar and no one comes up in Jesus' defense including Jesus.

He doesn't even come up in his own defense much. And Pilate he says I think he's innocent. Obviously Pilate had to have more knowledge of Jesus' situation than we read about.

And it would be crazy to assume he didn't I think given the paranoia the Romans felt about possible uprisings among the Jews there couldn't have been anyone as public and as popular as Jesus teaching without the Romans keeping an eye on him through most of his ministry I would think. Remember there were soldiers even watching John the Baptist. Remember the soldiers who said what shall we do and John gave them instruction? There were soldiers even there watching him.

Now Jesus who had become more popular than John certainly would have had such

people in his audience too. Okay, so they make these accusations but none of them are true. So Pilate asked him saying are you the king of the Jews? Okay, these people say that you're proclaiming yourself to be the Christ the King.

Is that true? And Jesus answered him and said it is as you say. Or simply you say. It is as is in italics.

So Jesus being a little obscure but he didn't deny he was the king of the Jews and in John's gospel there's a longer recording of the conversation and Pilate asked him are you the king of the Jews and Jesus said are you asking this because you really want to know or did someone tell you this about me? And Pilate said am I a Jew? Why would I care? You're not my king in any case. He says but your own people have delivered me to you. What have you done? And Jesus said my kingdom is not of this world.

If my kingdom was of this world my servants would have fought. Now probably Pilate didn't even know what that meant but he already knew that Jesus wasn't urging his people to fight and therefore that Jesus was not a king of the sort or proclaiming himself to be the kind of king that would be a problem to Rome because Jesus' servants are not going to be fighting. And Jesus said my kingdom is not of this world.

So afterwards Pilate said then you are a king. You're saying you're a king. You have a kingdom.

But obviously Pilate is hearing him say I'm not interested in fighting and my disciples they don't fight. So okay you're some kind of a king or another. You say you're a king but you know what are you here for? And Jesus said for this purpose I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth.

And Pilate said well what is truth? And then walked away. It's clear that Pilate was perplexed trying to figure out well why are these people trying to get him killed? What has he really done? And actually Pilate asks him that a number of times. It says in verse 4 then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd I find no fault in this man.

But they were the more fierce saying he stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee he asked if Jesus was from Galilee. It was a Galilean and as soon as he knew that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction he sent him to Herod who was also in Jerusalem at the time probably because of the feast.

Now when Herod saw Jesus he was exceedingly glad for he had desired for a long time to see him because he had heard many things about him. We read about this in Luke chapter 9 in verse 9 that Herod heard about Jesus' miracles and wanted to see him but apparently didn't get an opportunity until this time. But he'd wanted to for a long time so he's glad that Jesus was sent to him.

I get to have a show now, get to see some miracles. It says and he hoped to see some miracle done by him. Then he questioned him with many words but Jesus answered him nothing and the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him.

So the accusers followed him over to Herod's court because this was another trial. This was like an appeals court or something. The same charges had to be brought and accusations had to be made.

So they stood before Herod and made all these accusations but it says then Herod with his men of war treated him with contempt and mocked him, arrayed him in a gorgeous robe and sent him back to Pilate. Obviously Herod didn't take the charges seriously either. These poor Jews, they weren't getting anyone to take them seriously.

They were liars and they were lying at this very time. And the Romans knew they were lying so they kind of ignored the charges and just did what they wanted to do. I want to see a miracle from this guy.

I don't care about your charges because I've been wanting to see a miracle for a while so I want to try to get him to do that. But Jesus wouldn't do it. Jesus wouldn't accommodate him.

And so Jesus just stood there silently and so Herod sent him back to Pilate. Notice Herod didn't condemn him and that's what Pilate was giving over to Herod. The reason he was sent to Herod in the first place is because Pilate found Jesus to be a hot potato.

He didn't want to have to handle it. He was quite sure that Jesus was innocent but there was a crowd calling for his crucifixion. And so they're on the verge of some kind of a riot and he didn't want to compromise Roman justice because Romans cared about justice too for the most part.

Now I mean Pilate might wipe out innocent citizens in the temple or something like that but when he's actually got a man in court he's got to follow court procedures. And Roman justice required that a man not be condemned in court unless he's guilty of something. And Pilate couldn't find anything that Jesus was guilty of.

But he also didn't want to let him go because there's really a volatile situation with the crowds that wanted him dead. So when he heard them say he started in Galilee and came here he said oh Galilee is that where he originated from? By golly we got Herod in town just right now. And he's the ruler of Galilee.

Jesus is his problem not mine. And so he felt like he'd gotten rid of a problem by sending him to Herod. Herod didn't take the matter seriously at all.

He just wanted to be entertained. And Jesus didn't entertain him so he sent him back to Pilate and said you deal with it. And so it says that very day Pilate and Herod became

friends with each other for before that they had been at enmity with each other.

Now we don't know what the matters were between them before that they were upset about. But this day they changed and became friends or at least friendly I'm sure. Probably neither of them had any respect for the other.

They were probably political rivals. After all Herod's father Herod the Great had once ruled the region that Pilate now ruled. I'm sure Herod Antipas, this Herod, would like to have inherited the whole domain of his father Herod the Great but instead Pilate was given that part.

And so there's a sense in which Herod could easily have thought Pilate is given rule over the area that I should have inherited from my father. And I'm sure there was bad blood between them. I mean it may not be that they had a hot war going on.

Maybe just a cold war. Maybe they just didn't like each other. But they did more after this.

They became more friendly after this. Why? Well that's not ever stated. Luke doesn't tell us why it is.

But he doesn't make it sound like it's just a coincidence. I mean it makes it sound like as a result of all this they became friends. Perhaps they both became friends because they failed to do the right thing and they both had the same guilty conscience over the matter.

When you're, you know, partners in crime, you know, misery loves company and misery of conscience loves company too. If you know you're in the wrong and you know someone else is in the wrong the same way you feel more comfortable around them because, you know, you're not wrong alone. Pilate should have released Jesus no matter what the people thought.

If he's a court magistrate he should let innocent people go. He declared Jesus innocent. I find no fault in that.

That's acquittal. I acquit him of all charges. I've heard your charges.

I don't find them convincing. I declare him not guilty. That's what Pilate said.

He should have said, okay Jesus you're free to go. Instead because of his fear of the contempt and anger of the mob he said I want this off my hands and he sent it to Herod. Now Herod should have let him go too because Herod didn't believe he was guilty of anything.

And yet Herod didn't let him go either. These two guys both shirked their duty as magistrates. The duty of a magistrate is not only to send criminals to jail or whatever.

The duty of a magistrate is also to acquit people who are falsely accused and let them go free. Both of these men had that obligation. They both knew that was their obligation and they both shirked it and perhaps being partners in crime as they were made them have some affinity with each other.

It's interesting in the Bible we do read that people who had other matters of contention between them suddenly became friends or comrades when they were joined against Jesus. We read very early on in Jesus' ministry that the Pharisees joined with the Herodians in trying to kill Jesus. Well the Herodians and the Pharisees they were politically at odds with each other.

At any other time they wouldn't have anything to do with each other. But when they both saw Jesus as someone they wanted to get rid of they worked together. See Jesus is the great uniter.

Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ are united. Their differences are removed. People who are against each other who are against Christ they're united against Christ and that gives them something in common.

Herod and Pilate found something in common this day and became friends and it was their treatment of Christ. Then Pilate when he had called together the chief priests and rulers of the people said to them you have brought this man to me as one who misleads the people. Indeed I haven't examined him in your presence.

I have found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him. No neither did Herod for I sent you back to him and indeed nothing worthy of death has been done by him by Jesus. And Herod agrees.

That's two courts have acquitted him. I have acquitted him. I sent him to Herod if you wanted a second opinion from another court.

He acquitted him too. Like isn't it a no brainer? Let him go. Why are you holding him? Why not just let him walk? Well because Pilate was afraid.

And Pilate was a more just man than the Jews who accused Jesus. But he was a coward and that's not good for a leader of a country. Certainly a judge has to have the courage of his convictions and Pilate lacked that in this case.

But we find out why elsewhere. Because in John's gospel it says he said he was a king and anyone who says he's a king is no friend of Caesar. Okay now this is it.

This man is Caesar's enemy and you have to make a decision about what to do with him. What will Caesar think about the decision you make about somebody who's an enemy of Caesar? Well of course this puts the pressure on Pilate. Pilate and Caesar had a tenuous relationship anyway.

In all likelihood he was assigned to Judea because he was being punished. Because no Roman procurator wanted to govern Judea. It was ungovernable.

It was like a punishment. I think that Pilate felt like his relationship with Caesar was tenuous enough and he would have more problems with Caesar if the Jews as they were implying would send news to Caesar that they had brought to him an enemy of Caesar and he had released him. Well that won't go well for you Pilate.

And Pilate I think knew he could put two and two together. And therefore he didn't release Jesus when he should have. That was cowardly of him.

But he was caught between a rock and a hard place. It's just that when you are caught between a rock and a hard place you should do the right thing. And he didn't quite have that backbone to do that.

But he says I have found nothing wrong with him and Herod has found nothing wrong with him. Verse 16. I will therefore chastise him and release him.

Chastise him would mean flog him. That would be serious. The 39 lashes is something that few men would want to endure in a lifetime.

Few men could endure it twice and survive it. There is a very severe beating as Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* illustrates by drawing that out very long in the movie and showing the gory details. Probably fairly accurately.

That's chastising. That's not condemning. That's what you do to an innocent man.

He's innocent but I'll chastise him for you. You're bloodthirsty people. Will that be enough blood for you? Will you let me off the hook then if I punish him that way? But they wouldn't even settle for that.

Now it says in verse 17 For it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast. And they all cried out at once saying away with this man and release to us Barabbas who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city and for murder. Pilate therefore wishing to release Jesus again called out to them but they shouted saying crucify him, crucify him.

And he said to them the third time why? What evil has he done? I have found no reason for death in him. I will therefore chastise him and let him go. But they were insistent demanding with a loud voice or with loud voices that he be crucified.

And the voices of these men prevailed. The text is receptive and of the chief priests. That particular phrase is missing from the older manuscripts but it doesn't matter.

It's the crowd certainly instigated by the chief priests. So Pilate gave sentence that he should be as they requested killed. And he released him to them.

He released to them the one they requested which was Barabbas who for insurrection and murder had been thrown into prison. But he delivered Jesus to their will. Now there's an irony about this of course.

There was this policy Pilate had. He may have inherited it from his predecessor we don't know. But to keep the Jews happy one of their Jews, fellow Jews who had been arrested for political crimes or whatever would be released at the Passover season just to show the clemency of Rome.

And the Jews got to decide which political prisoner they wanted to release. Now Jesus was a political prisoner. Not really but that's what they claimed he was.

They claimed he was coming because of political positions he took when in fact it was because they thought he was a blasphemer which isn't political. It's religious. But Pilate says listen I you know even if you think this guy is guilty of something I should let him go because it's Passover.

I'm supposed to let one of your prisoners go. What more worthy person to let go than someone I can't even find anything wrong with. But they wouldn't hear it.

They said no Barabbas is the one. We want Barabbas. Now what's interesting is Barabbas means son of a father.

Bar means son and Abba is father. And Barabbas means the son of a father. What's even more interesting is in Matthew 27.16 the oldest manuscripts not the ones that are used in the New King James but the oldest manuscripts in Matthew 27.16 says his name was Jesus Barabbas.

Jesus the son of a father. So here we have two people being considered to be let go. One Jesus who is the son of the father.

The son of God. And the other who is another Jesus the son of another father. It's just interesting.

I don't know that I can make any deep theological points but it certainly it's either incredibly coincidental or something that is set up by providence that these two men both named Jesus both of them surnamed for their fathers would be both standing there. One of them is to be acquitted. One is to be chosen.

And the people chose the murderer Barabbas. Now by the way when Peter is preaching his second sermon in Acts chapter 3 he makes a point of the irony of this thing. Not so much the names of the two men Jesus but the differences between them.

And it says in Acts 3.13 and 14 Peter is preaching he says the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus whom you delivered up and

denied in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go. Pilate was determined to let him go but he got blackmailed and had to cave in or felt like he had to. But you denied the holy one and the just and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and killed the prince of life.

Now Jesus isn't usually called the prince of life. That's an unusual title for him but Peter obviously chooses it because of the contrast with murderer. Jesus is the one who rules in the realm of life.

He's the giver of life. The man you chose is a man who takes lives. This underscores what Jesus said to the Jews of his time in John 8.44. You're of your father the devil.

He's a murderer and you want to do the will of your father. You want to be a murderer too. You side with murder not with life.

And that was what Peter points out to them in that sermon as well. So they said give us Barabbas and he did and so finally under pressure and by the way Luke goes over this much more briefly than say John does who spends parts of two chapters on it. He releases Jesus to be crucified.

He gives Rome's approval. Now he didn't just release Jesus to be stoned by the Jews. He was not giving the Jews authority to kill Jesus.

He was just going to do what they wanted and have Rome kill him. It actually says in John's gospel that in having Pilate make the decision about the death it fulfilled the words that Jesus spoke in John 12 about how he would die. He said I must be lifted up and that means crucified.

And so it's interesting when the Jews said to Pilate we don't have authority to put a man to death. John says when he's telling that story this was to fulfill what Jesus said about the manner he'd die. Why? Because if the Jews did have authority to put him to death they would have stoned him.

But the Romans typically crucified people like this and Jesus had predicted he'd be crucified. So this depriving of the Jews of authority to kill their own criminals and leaving it in the hands of the Romans meant that Jesus would die in the Roman manner not the Jewish manner. And that was crucifixion.

Now as they led him away they laid hold of a certain man Simon a Cyrenian who was coming from the country and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus. Now you might want to look at Mark chapter 15 because there's a little more information given about this man Simon the Cyrenian. The parallel of this is Mark 15 and Mark when he tells about this in verse 21 Mark 15, 21 says now they compelled a certain man Simon a Cyrenian the father of Alexander and Rufus as he was coming out of the country and passing by to bear his cross.

Now why does he say the father of Alexander and Rufus? A man in scripture if they want to give more detail about who he is they say who his parents are, who his father is not who his children are. If there were lots of Simons around and there were it would be more reasonable to say Simon son of so and so. After all Jesus referred to Peter that way.

Simon bar Jonah. Simon son of Jonah. But Mark doesn't say Simon the son of so and so he said Simon the father of these two men Alexander and Rufus.

Now Mark was writing as we believe his gospel to readership in Rome. And therefore we probably should assume that the Roman Christians were familiar with Alexander and Rufus as probably members of their church. The sons of this Simon.

Now whether Simon was in the church or not or maybe he had died and was not known to those people in Rome because he had died or maybe he had never gone to Rome. But it would appear that Alexander and Rufus his sons had migrated to Rome and were in the church of Rome and so Mark in identifying this man more particularly to his audience mentioned his sons which presumably means that his readers would be people who knew his sons. Now when Paul later wrote the letter to the church in Rome in Romans 16 he sends greetings to a number of people who lived in the church of Rome and in chapter 16 verse 13 Paul says greet Rufus chosen in the Lord and his mother and mine.

Now here's a Christian in the Roman church named Rufus Mark seems to know of a Christian in the Roman church named Rufus and his brother Alexander and they were the sons of this man Simon who carried Jesus' cross for him. What happened to Alexander? Well he might have died by the time Paul wrote Romans I don't know or maybe he had moved away from Rome but Paul sends greetings to Rufus who is in the church of Rome also to Rufus' mother which would be Simon Cyrene's wife who must have also become a Christian Paul even refers to her as my mom too obviously not literally his mother but just like Timothy wasn't literally his son but these relationships were spiritual relationships and apparently Simon of Cyrene and his wife or at least his wife had been like friends like older brothers and sisters or parents to Paul in the early days of his conversion likely we don't know much more I mean it's just interesting to see these particular connections. What's more many people would reasonably wonder when Matthew Mark and Luke all tell us that Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross well didn't Jesus ever carry his own cross? Don't we picture Jesus carrying his own cross at least part of the way? In fact the traditional picture is that Jesus began toward Golgotha carrying his cross but stumbled under it and the Romans had to select someone from the crowd this Simon to carry his cross for him.

It's a reasonable assumption but it's not recorded. The Bible does not record Jesus stumbling under the cross. It does record though that he left Jerusalem after his condemnation by Pilate carrying his cross.

We see that in John 19.17 it says and he bearing his cross went out to a place called the

place of the skull. Jesus left the presence of the Roman court carrying his cross but all the synoptics tell us that this man Simon was forced to carry it for him. So something happened Jesus didn't get all the way there before someone else took over the load.

Now it's the idea that Jesus stumbled and couldn't carry his cross is the traditional picture we get and it may very well explain this phenomenon. That would be one reason. It's also possible that the Romans because Pilate was sympathetic toward Jesus actually were given instructions to you know have a little bit of compassion more than they would on a common criminal who really was an enemy of Rome.

And after Jesus carried the cross the way that maybe the Romans just decided let's have someone else do it. We do know that Pilate was in fact sympathetic toward Jesus despite condemning him. In fact Pilate's wife had sent him a message one of the gospels tells us that said don't have anything to do with this righteous man I had a dream about him and the Romans did put a lot of stock in dreams.

And so Pilate was nervous about condemning Jesus and it's very possible that he mitigated the severity of the treatment that Jesus would have received had Pilate really believed him to be an enemy of Rome. We don't know but they instead of Jesus carrying the cross all the way all three synoptics including Luke here tell us that someone else carried the cross at least part of the way. Verse 27 And a great multitude of the people followed him women who also mourned and lamented him but Jesus turning to them said daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me but weep for yourselves and for your children for indeed the days are coming in which they will say blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts which never nursed then they will begin to say to the mountains fall on us and to the hills cover us for if they do these things in the green wood what will they do in the dry.

Okay this little pericope is not found elsewhere than in Luke this is Luke's unique information that tells us about a conversation Jesus apparently though very badly beaten no doubt exhausted from being awake all night and being beaten on the face and whipped and all that still was conscious still had his wits about him enough to actually make this comment to the women that were weeping now these women who were weeping were probably not professional mourners because you didn't usually hire professional mourners to mourn for a political criminal who is going to be crucified they were probably really sympathetic they really saw this was an injustice some of them might have been people who had received healings or their children had received healings from him these were people who were crying for him because they pitied him and he said you shouldn't really be pitying me right now I mean not that I'm not a worthy object of pity but actually it's going to be far worse for you and your children what's going to be far worse for them and their children now if we take him to mean hell then why would he say they're going to hell these are sympathizers these are people who are on his side why would he warn them about hell no these are the inhabitants of Jerusalem

they and their children are the generation that will see the siege that would come in AD 70 and he's saying you're going to really wish you didn't have children at that time Josephus tells us that some of the people actually ate their children during the siege because they were starving it was a horrendous thing they suffered much longer than Jesus did on this particular day don't worry about me I'm going to get through this you guys on the other hand you're going to really wish you'd never had kids you're going to really have you should be weeping for yourself and your children and he says for if they do these things in the green wood or to a green tree the word wood can be translated tree what will they be done in the dry tree what's that mean first of all who are they well I think we can safely say they are the Romans well what were they doing to a green tree they were crucifying Jesus he's the green tree a green tree is a living tree a tree that is presumably fruitful he was a living fruitful tree bearing fruit Jerusalem on the other hand had ceased to be a living tree it was a dried up old tree it produced no fruit it was like that fig tree that Jesus told in a parable that was given several years to bear fruit and never did so it was going to be torn down or like John the Baptist said every tree that does not bring forth fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire he's talking about AD 70 and that's what Jesus is talking about if the Romans do this to someone like me an innocent person who actually has some ways in which I benefit people around me I'm a green tree if they do that to me what are they going to do to you not you women but your city this rotten dead fruitless criminal city what are the Romans going to do to them it's going to be far worse he's implying that's why they and their children are the ones to be affected verse 32 there were also two others criminals led with him to be put to death and when they had come to the place called Calvary there they crucified him and the criminals one on the right hand and one on the left why were there two criminals crucified that day too this is the eve of the Passover it was actually a very inconvenient time to crucify people if you're going to do it because their bodies have to be removed from the cross before sundown and it usually took more than a day for a crucified person to die it often took three days they just hang out there in the sun dehydrating and and you know dying and asphyxiating and they sometimes take two or three days to die if you want to kill someone by crucifixion why not wait until a time when you don't have to take them down by sunset there seemed to be to my mind and this is my imagination only but it makes sense to me I think Pilate was angry at the Jews for pressuring him to do what he knew was wrong to do and to condemn Jesus he didn't dare displease them because they'd report him to Caesar but he was going to get back at them these two criminals were no doubt Jewish criminals too in fact my guess is they were compatriots with Barabbas one of the gospels tells us that Barabbas had been arrested with some other insurrectionists Pilate had in jail Barabbas and some of his companions in crime and he was more or less pressured into giving up Barabbas now Barabbas was a true criminal against Rome Pilate didn't want to let Barabbas go he's just the kind of man that the Romans wanted to crucify but because of the pressure he had to give up Barabbas but he didn't have to give up Barabbas' partners my guess is these two men were Barabbas' partners that had been arrested with him there were some we know and

because of probably anger at the Jews and at Barabbas for this whole situation coming about that Barabbas goes free and Pilate ends up compromising what he knows to be justice and so forth all this has got to be making him mad I think he probably just said while you're taking these Jews out there grab Barabbas' friends and go crucify them too they're not going to get away in other words I think he was just venting his frustration there's no reason for you to believe me about that by the way but I think it's true I think that's the case why else would he crucify two other people the same day when it was not the most convenient day at all to crucify and he wasn't really in the mood for crucifying that day he wanted to let Jesus go was this just the day these other two guys were slated for execution that's possible but I think that they were thrown in with the deal you want me to kill Jesus okay I'm going to kill your friends here too your fellow Jewish enemies of Rome and these two men were robbers or malefactors and they were crucified on either side of Jesus and then it says in verse 34 then Jesus said father forgive them for they do not know what they do and they divided the garments and cast lots an important verse this is probably the first thing Jesus said from the cross there are seven statements all together that the gospel writers record that Jesus uttered from the cross usually referred to as the seven sayings from the cross each of them pregnant with meaning each of them a preaching text but none of the gospels records all seven of them Luke records more of them than any others he records three the other four are found in the other three gospels in different places we have this one and we have also in verse 43 him saying to the thief today you'll be with me in paradise also in verse 46 he said father into your hands I commit my spirit now he also said some other things that aren't recorded in Luke he saw John and Mary at the foot of the cross he said woman behold your son son behold your mother that's one of his sayings on one occasion he said I thirst that's not recorded here another one is where he said it is finished and so there are some other sayings of Jesus besides the ones Luke gives but Luke gives three of the seven right here now he said father forgive them they don't know what they're doing now this should tell us something about God's disposition if it's the same as that of Christ and that is that God is not a hater of sinners he's actually sympathetic with them knowing their ignorance they don't know what they're doing they're doing a horrible thing in fact what they were doing right then at that moment was the very worst thing any sinners ever did on the planet in history no greater sin has ever been committed than that which was committed at this time by these people and Jesus was sympathetic to them he said father they don't know what they're doing forgive them if this is true what sins would he not forgive Jesus was the friend of sinners as he was accused of being and if Jesus was so is God God's the friend of sinners that's why he came Jesus to rescue them he could have just left them to their fate but God loves sinners and he recognizes ignorance Peter later said to the Jews when he was preaching to them in Acts chapter 3 I know you did it in ignorance as did your fathers or not no your fathers your leaders who crucified Jesus so Peter recognized they were they didn't know what they're doing either now they knew they were doing the wrong thing certainly but they didn't know how wrong it was certainly they were not to be just excused as if they weren't sinning they did have to be

forgiven after all forgive them means they're doing the wrong thing they're not innocent here but they're not as guilty as you and I know they are dad we know what they're doing they don't know the importance of this so we simply see you know in the case of someone being killing you unjustly and torturing you and flogging you having this attitude well I know you don't realize how serious this is what you're doing I'm praying for your forgiveness and Stephen the first martyr had exactly the same attitude when he was being stoned unjustly by frankly the same group essentially unless Jesus is talking about the Romans here which is possible but it was the Jews who condemned Jesus also condemned Stephen and when he was dying he said Lord do not lay this sin to their charge just the same thing this forgiveness of his enemies it's remarkable Jesus said his disciples must like himself do good to his enemies love his enemies and so forth and here we see him doing just that now it says at the end of verse 34 they divide his garments and cast lots Jesus had two garments I think John tells us this in more detail one of the Gospels does Jesus had two garments a regular robe such as anyone wore and then they had a cloak that would be thrown across the body when they're walking around but people would wrap it around in like a coat when it's cold or even sleep under it they had their regular garments more like a regular robe and then this cloak that was versatile and the cloak that Jesus had was apparently just ordinary rough cloth like any peasant Jew would have it wasn't worth much but cloth was worth something so the soldiers were told elsewhere there were four centurions at the foot of the cross they divided that cloak four different ways tore it into four pieces and gave each a piece cloth had some value better divide it up than just throw it away but the robe that Jesus wore was apparently the gift of someone who was very generous and very wealthy because the Bible says it was a very costly robe it was woven seamlessly from the neck all the way down so it was a woven garment not sewn together or anything like that it's a more difficult more costly way to make a garment and so probably some admirer of his who had some money provided this garment for him and the soldiers didn't want to tear it into pieces it was worth too much so they said okay we'll divide up his cloak four ways but this garment we're going to have winner takes all on this one and so they gambled for it and so it says both they divided his garments which is when they tore up his cloak and cast lots and that was for his robe that's not made as clear here as it is in some of the more detailed descriptions elsewhere but this of course is a fulfillment of Psalm 22 which very clearly in verse 17 said they divide my garments among them and cast lots from my vesture so I mean this is a very remarkable detailed fulfillment of prophecy and David wrote it a thousand years before this almost exactly a thousand years before this and yet he was very detailed in his ability to predict this event and this you know sometimes people say well Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy because he knew what the prophecy said so he arranged to be the one who appeared to be the Messiah by doing things like riding on a donkey and so forth so that people would think he was the Messiah well did Jesus instruct these soldiers to cast lots for his clothing I don't think so the prophecy is fulfilled because the prophets were inspired that's why it's fulfilled verse 35 and the people stood looking on but even the rulers with them sneered saying he

saved others let him save himself if he is the Christ the chosen of God and the soldiers also mocked him coming and offering him sour wine and saying if you are the king of the Jews save yourself and an inscription also was written over him in the letters Greek, Latin, and Hebrew this is written by Pilate by the way and it was commonplace to put an inscription over a crucified man usually it contained the charges this man is being killed because he did this and that but Pilate had this message put over Jesus this is the king of the Jews and he had it in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew so people of all languages could see it now this too Pilate did I think as a jab to the Jews because after all if this is their king this emaciated, beaten, crucified criminal what must they be like if they have such a king as this I mean this is their pitiful excuse for a king and so it's no doubt it was intended as something of an insult to the Jews and we're told in John 19 verses 20-22 that the Jews objected to this being put up there they said don't say this is the king of Jews say he said I am the king of the Jews because that's really the crime he's being crucified for why don't you put down what you normally put down his crime he said he's the king of the Jews we don't object to saying that he said that but you make it sound like he is the king of the Jews but we're told in John chapter 19 that when this objection was brought to Pilate he said what I've written I've written and he didn't change it so he left it as an insult to the Jews but also maybe as a bit of a tribute to Jesus it's hard to know exactly what was going through his mind. Verse 39 then one of the criminals who were hanging blasphemed him saying if you are the Christ save yourself and us but the other answering rebuked him saying do you not even fear God seeing that you're under the same condemnation and we indeed justly for we receive the due reward for our deeds but this man has done nothing wrong then he said to Jesus Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus said to him assuredly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise. Now this Luke Luke is the only one who tells us that this one of these thieves came around actually in Mark 15 32 it says that both the thieves hurled insults at him and no doubt they did he was on the cross for six hours after all and it's hard not to join in the festivities when somebody's getting picked on by everyone if you're a person of weak character like most people are you just kind of join in hey yeah look at you now you say you're the messiah what a pitiful messiah you are apparently even the thieves mocked him and you might say but that how weird is that for someone who's dying on a cross to mock somebody else well that's what one of them eventually came to think to say wait a minute we're we're dying on a cross too like him and we deserve it and so one of them actually had a change of heart and says you know you ought to fear God more than that he rebuked the other thief and he then asked Jesus for mercy what's interesting is that he said to him Lord thus calling Jesus Lord and he meant by this no doubt Messiah because he said remember me when you come into your kingdom here's a man looking at Jesus who does not look like someone who's about to come into a kingdom anytime soon or ever now when Jesus was roaming around the countryside healing and doing miracles for people say oh you're the king of the Jews I want to be in your kingdom that would be not too surprising but here's a man who is not a believer a few hours earlier and all he has seen of Jesus is Jesus hanging on our cross

obviously very near death and says I believe you I believe you have a kingdom I want to be in that kingdom with you remember me when you come into your kingdom what an incredible faith statement that is much more than for you or me because we know Jesus rose from the dead did this man know Jesus rise from the dead I doubt it he probably never heard Jesus predicted and seriously you don't ever assume anyone's going to rise from the dead if you see them die this man could only have believed Jesus on the basis of him being convinced that Jesus knew what he was talking about and even though it couldn't be imagined how he could ever come into a kingdom from the state he was now in yet the man must have felt like Jesus you're credible to me if you say so I believe you Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom that's actually a very good thing to say for a dying person because that's our only hope of course is for God to remember us for Christ to remember us after we died this man barely got in but Jesus said you're in he said assuredly I say to you today you'll be with me in paradise now this raises one question that's been debated did they go immediately that day to paradise mostly we say yes because Jesus said today you'll be with me in paradise there are some and especially the Seventh-day Adventists are the ones who usually came up with this argument they say that well there's no punctuation in the Greek you could put the comma one word later so that Jesus says assuredly I save you today comma you shall be with me in paradise but that Jesus is not saying you'll be with me in paradise today but I'm saying it to you today someday in the resurrection of the last day you'll be with me in paradise and I'm telling you that today this day where it doesn't seem likely at all I'm telling you this day you will be with me in paradise and so some have felt that Jesus is not affirming that they went immediately that day to paradise but he's simply saying I'm telling you that today there will be another day when you will be with me in paradise but today I'm giving you that assurance before you die at this day where it seems so unlikely there's a possibility of that I'm skeptical of that change of punctuation for the simple reason that Jesus never said it that way before he often said very rarely I say unto you but on no other occasion did he say very rarely I say unto you today so this would be a difference in his normal way of speaking and I don't know that we're expected to assume it so but for those who believe that there's no soul survival even of the saved after death this is one solution for them to a passage that would otherwise be problematic for them there are people who think that when you die your soul is just asleep or non-existent or unconscious until the resurrection but then you come back alive and those are the ones who would find it probably more likely to put the comma one word later in this particular statement after the word today 44 and it was about the sixth hour and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour sixth hour by Jewish reckoning is noon the day begins at six in the morning the sixth hour is noon the ninth hour is three in the afternoon that's the second half of Jesus hanging on the cross these other things apparently happen in the first three hours because Mark tells us in Mark chapter 15 that when Jesus was crucified it was the third hour Mark 15 25 says now it was the third hour and they crucified him that'd be nine in the morning so Jesus was crucified the third hour that's nine in the morning and after this conversation with the thief on the cross it was

the sixth hour that's noon and then he died the ninth hour so he's on the cross six hours from nine till three now the reason it mentions this period between the sixth hour and the ninth hour is because the sun was darkened during that time verse 45 says and the veil of the temple was torn in two this fact is reported in all three of the synoptic gospels the tearing of the veil and of course it suggests that the obstruction that had kept people from having access to God and the Holy of Holies was now by God himself removed the veil which stood between man and God in the temple was now torn in two supernaturally so it was God removing that obstruction and allowing anyone to approach him now through Christ's death and when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice he said Father into your hands I command my spirit and having said this he breathed his last this by the way is a quotation from the Psalms much of what Jesus said is a quotation of the Psalms this is from Psalm 31 in verse 5 into your hands I commit my spirit this has the meaning very much like the child's prayer in English now I lay me down to sleep I pray this dear Lord my soul to keep I put my spirit in your hands if I should die before I wake I pray to Lord my soul to take it's when children are taught to pray at bedtime they're often told to commit the keeping of their souls to God while they sleep and that is what Jewish children were taught to pray too and although Psalm 31 was not written as a child's prayer the Jews did adopt it as a child's prayer and Jewish parents taught their children this childhood prayer at bedtime it's a bedtime prayer Father into your hands I commit my spirit it's almost certain that Jesus would have learned this at his mother's knee and prayed it at night when he was a little boy and his mother who stood at the foot of the cross no doubt heard him and in all likelihood remembered teaching him that prayer and of course recognized that that was his final prayer before he died as well as his soul was now being commended into the hands of God now when the centurion saw what had happened he glorified God saying certainly this was a righteous man now in Matthew 2454 the guard said this was the son of God and that's a significantly different reading but Matthew's writing for Jews and Luke for Gentiles and that may have something to do with it a son of God if he didn't mean the son of God in the Trinitarian sense and how would the Roman know that how would the Roman have any sense of the Trinitarian doctrine of the divine sonship of Christ and so forth probably he didn't when a Roman said this was the son of God or a son of God he probably just meant a righteous man a good man a son of the gods is not necessarily literally so even the Jews spoke of good people as sons of God even we do we're sons of God so I mean it's possible that the Romans said this truly is a son of God or the son of God but the meaning of it was a righteous man rather than the Christian doctrine of Christ's divine sonship I mean that is something that you would hardly expect a centurion standing at the foot of the cross to understand right at that time anyway the whole crowd who came together to the site seeing what had been done beat their breasts in return beating their breasts would be a sign of great grief and all his acquaintances and the women who followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things these particular women are named for us elsewhere we won't go into it right now but we will when we come to chapter 24 there were a number of women most of them were named Mary Mary Magdalene Mary the

mother of Jesus Mary the mother of Clophas Mary the wife of Clophas Mary the mother of Joses as you read the different gospels you got all these women most of them are named Mary one is named Joanne and one is named Salome the rest are named Mary anyway Mary is a very common name for women in that society obviously and it says in verse 50 and behold there was a man named Joseph a council member that is a member of the Sanhedrin a good and just man so there were a few on the council him and Nicodemus though Nicodemus is only mentioning John's gospel along with Joseph of Arimathea both were Sanhedrists but they both were of a different mind than the majority he had not consented to their counsel and deed he either had spoken out and been drowned out by the majority or else he maybe he was not even present when they called this night time meeting of the court they might have just called a quorum they might have left out the people they knew might be against their decision certainly Joseph of Arimathea when he saw this he didn't approve of it he was from Arimathea a city of the Jews who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God so he was part of that faithful remnant in Israel this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus that would be a controversial thing to do this man died as a Roman criminal a criminal against Rome ostensibly officially and here's a Jewish man says I want to honor this criminal by burying him can I have his body to side with a man that Rome had condemned would be a very dangerous thing for someone to do publicly because it would normally raise suspicions oh are you a collaborator with these insurrectionists we better keep our eye on you too but Joseph of Arimathea boldly came to Pilate and said I want to bury him and Pilate of course was never really against Jesus never really did believe Jesus was an insurrectionist so he cooperated so he took the body down and wrapped it in linen and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock where no one had ever lain before it was his own family tomb he was a rich man and apparently had a very large estate and burial plot so this was a newly cut tomb that they put Jesus in that day was the preparation which means Friday usually the preparation is the technical name for Friday in the Jewish culture although this could have been a different preparation many think it was a special preparation which was the first day of the Passover week and that could be called a preparation also even if it wasn't a Friday but actually the Jews always spoke of Friday as the preparation because they were preparing for the Sabbath every week and so that's the technical name for Friday in the Jewish speech so without any other qualifications being given Luke would be understood to be saying this is Friday this happened though there are other theories about what day it was and the Sabbath drew near and the woman who had come with him from Galilee followed after and they observed the tomb and how his body was laid then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment they couldn't anoint his body on the Sabbath that's not allowed but he was buried just before sundown on the Sabbath they didn't have a chance to really show their respect so they had to rest on the Sabbath and then Sunday morning they would be able to come or even Saturday night after sundown but that wouldn't have been convenient so Sunday morning they'd come back intending to show their respects to the dead body but they didn't find a dead body

when they came Sunday morning and that's what we read about in the next chapter and we'll wait to comment on that until next time